



## **Shelby County Office of Preparedness HLS / EMA**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **“Hurricane Elvis” 10-Year Anniversary**



In the early morning hours of July 22, 2003, ten years ago, Shelby County citizens awoke to howling winds and torrential rains called a “derecho (de ray cho).” Later nicknamed “Hurricane Elvis,” this sudden blast of destructive straight-line winds blew through the MidSouth damaging over 300,000 homes and leaving 750,000 households in the dark.

Because there was no wind rotation, the outdoor warning sirens were not activated and most citizens were still asleep when it occurred.

According to the National Weather Service, the top wind speed of this event was an incredible 102 miles per hour as it hit downtown Memphis (where AutoZone is located now). Hundreds of mature trees were pulled up by their roots and over 1,000 utility poles snapped in half. It was reported that 800 transformers blew as a result of the high winds. Transportation throughout the county was stifled due to 75% of the traffic signals malfunctioning – turning most intersections into a 4-way stop. Memphis International Airport took a hit, causing Northwest Airlines hub to close.

**Hurricane Elvis cost:** One direct fatality, 6 indirect fatalities, some families and businesses were without power for up to 16 days, and over \$500 million in damages.

The Emergency Operations Center was activated for this event to coordinate the efforts of all agencies to assess the damage and clean up the debris. Shelby County was declared a federal disaster area by the president.

A derecho occurs mostly in spring and summer, but can occur any time of the year. It is a widespread, long-lived straight-line wind storm produced by several thunderstorms with hurricane force winds.

The Shelby County Office of Preparedness, under the leadership of Bob Nations, Jr., Director, reminds citizens that disasters, such as “Hurricane Elvis,” can happen any time with little warning. Be ready for weather events by:

- Having a NOAA All-Hazards Weather radio with the S.A.M.E. feature, tone alert, and battery back-up.
- Creating a disaster kit for home, work and auto, with enough supplies to sustain you, your family, and pets for up to 7 days.
- Making sure you have a “safe place” to go to at home and at work. It should be on the lowest floor, center of the building, away from windows and doors.
- And most of all, practicing your plans with your family and co-workers. Be prepared to shelter-in-place or evacuate at a moment’s notice.

**We may not be able to prevent or predict some disasters, but we can plan to survive them.**

**End of Release**